

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE B-7

THE WASHINGTON POST
21 May 1978

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Aegean Scapegoating

For an American journalist, a trip through Turkey and Greece is now an exercise in masochism. Everywhere he goes, on both sides of the Aegean, he is damned and accused and warned of disaster if the United States fails to take "proper" action to solve the problems in the eastern Mediterranean.

Roughly translated, in Ankara this means "abandon the Greeks"; in Athens it means "flail the Turks." After two weeks of constant exposure to this litany, reports my associate Joe Spear, it becomes nauseating.

It is a fact that the Johnson and Nixon administrations supported a repressive military junta in Greece for seven years. It is a fact that Henry Kissinger engineered a tilt toward the Turks during and after their invasion of Cyprus in 1974. And it is equally true that Congress reacted by slapping an arms embargo on Turkey.

But the United States did not instigate the feud between these likeable people. And they simply will not—perhaps they innately cannot—entertain the idea that they, themselves, have something to do with their own fates. "External forces" are responsible; and in this era of anti-Americanism, the president, Congress and, above all, the CIA have become the scapegoats.

Turkey, for example, is currently plagued with a wave of violence in the streets. Extreme factions of the left and right are shooting and bombing each other with abandon, and well over 100 Turks have been killed this year.

An occasional Turk will admit that the problem has social and economic roots. More typical are the opinions of two prominent journalists, who charged that the CIA is behind the violence. The Greeks believe with equal passion that they are the victims of a mysterious and pernicious plot cooked up by the CIA in cahoots with Turkey.

The Turks and the Greeks, moreover, refuse to recognize that the United States has its own interests to protect. Each move by Washington is judged solely by how one side perceives it will affect the other. Objective analysis of the important issues in Ankara and Athens is all too rare. Emotions rule the day. When Turks or Greeks speak about events, they usually describe them in terms of their feelings.

A high-level official in the Turkish foreign ministry, for instance, said the U.S. arms embargo came as a "bad shock" to the Turks. "We are a sentimental people," he said, and Turkey's relations with the United States had been an "unrequited love affair."

Similarly, the Greeks are deeply hurt by Carter's efforts to end the embargo against Turkey. "Americans and Greeks are brothers," said Panayiotis Papaligouras, who retired as the foreign minister a few days ago. "It is a family fight. Unfortunately, these are sometimes the worst kind of fights."

The United States even holds the key, some believe, to the Aegean crisis. Following the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, the Greeks heavily fortified their Aegean Islands, some of which lie only a few miles from the Turkish mainland. Meanwhile, the Turks organized a 60,000-man "Aegean army," armed with helicopters and well over 100 landing craft, and stationed it on the coast opposite the Greek islands. The Turks have also claimed rights to a share of the minerals that lie beneath the Aegean and have attempted to assert control over half of the Aegean airspace. The Turks would quickly abandon their "expansionist ideas," said several Greeks, if the United States would get tough with Ankara.

Eventually, there arises the nagging suspicion that flagellation of the United States has become a handy political tool.

In Athens, to cite just one piece of evidence, the Greek military establishment has been agitating for a return to NATO, from which they withdrew their forces in 1974. But, according to one secret U.S. intelligence report from Athens, "the Greek leadership . . . believes that public opinion and the internal political situation will not permit a re-entry under existing circumstances." They want to get back into NATO on a "de facto" basis without taking the "politically dangerous step of formally announcing" it, thus giving Greece "the best of two worlds."

Turkey has its share of demagogues who eagerly excoriate the United States. Ecevit has generally avoided such tactics, but even he can stomp

Washington with vigor when it is expedient. In a recent cable, stamped "confidential," Ronald Spiers, the U.S. ambassador to Turkey, pondered a chauvinistic speech by Ecevit and wondered why he had engaged in "mindless nationalism."

"The danger," concluded Spiers, "is that he may so enjoy the popular claim that comes from talking back to Americans, that he will continue it..."